

Obituary

Margaret Solveig Mattson, 1936-1996



Dr. Margaret Solveig Mattson, who worked at the National Archives for nearly twenty years, died on 30 August 1996 after a courageous battle with cancer. Her friends in the archival community deeply regret the loss of a very intelligent and inspiring colleague.

Daughter of a Norwegian father and an Irish mother, and proud of her heritage on both sides, Margaret was born in Kingston, Ontario on 18 March 1936. In her adult life, she used to joke that she always spent her birthday recovering from St. Patrick's Day. Born with only a partial left ear, she depended entirely on her right ear for hearing. Although she adjusted very well to this handicap, and became an expert lip-reader, her hearing problem was a source of frustration all her life.

Margaret earned her B.A. and M.A. in history from the University of Windsor. She taught at St. Mary's High School, Kitchener, then at the Department of National Defence NATO base in Grestenquin, France, and at Holy Name School in Kingston Mills. She then began doctoral studies.

Margaret became an archivist in 1972, joining the staff of the Manuscript Division of the Public (now National) Archives of Canada. She worked in the area of political archives, an appropriate assignment because she was always very interested in politics.

Probably her most impressive achievement in the Manuscript Division was her exhibition on telecommunications in Canada. Opening in 1974, the one hundredth anniversary of the invention of the telephone, this multi-media exhibition was entitled "Telecommunications: The Canadian Experience." It combined manuscript material with public records, maps, photos, sound recordings, videos, and artifacts. Included were taped excerpts of speeches by Quebec Premier Maurice Duplessis, Alberta Premier William Aberhart, and Canadian Prime Ministers W.L.M. King, R.B. Bennett, and P.-E. Trudeau. Artifacts included a replica of a television set built in 1932, a piece of the first trans-Atlantic telephone cable, and a model of Anik I, the world's first domestic synchronous communications satellite. The quality and the variety of the exhibits demonstrated Margaret's understanding of what would appeal to visitors and also her initiative in arranging loans from other archives and museums, both public and private.

Margaret also continued work on her doctoral dissertation, "The Growth and Protection of Canadian Civil and Commercial Aviation, 1918-1930," and received her Ph.D. from the University of Western Ontario in 1979.

She was very active in historical and archival circles, and served as President of the Eastern Ontario Archivists Association in 1980-81. In 1983, as a result of a competition, she became Head of the Trade and Communications Section in the Government Archives Division of the Public Archives. Later she worked on a special assignment in the Office of the Director General, Historical Resources Branch, dealing particularly with acquisition strategy. She retired in 1992.

In all her activities Margaret was intense and assertive, and she always fought vigorously for what she thought was right. She was a perfectionist, and every detail was important to her. She also had a strong social conscience, and was very concerned about the less fortunate in our society.

Her life outside the Archives was very active and reflected her diverse interests. Swimming and skiing, relaxing at her property on Wolfe Island, soaking up the sun in Hawaii, touring the highways and biways of Europe—all had their charms for her. She was very sociable and always enjoyed a party, and she possessed a delightful, sometimes irreverent, sense of humour. She was a generous person, devoted to her extended family of brothers, sisters-in-law, nieces, nephews, and cousins, and she was a very loyal friend.

It is tragic that Margaret had so little time to enjoy her retirement, but she made the most of the time she had. Friends and former colleagues will remember her as a very intelligent and committed person with a wide variety of interests and a great zest for life. We will miss her a lot.

Grace Hyam

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